

Walking in the Footsteps of the Flock

Song of Solomon 1:8; Jeremiah 6:16

July 14, 2019

Greg L. Price

Jesus spoke of a broad way (a very wide road) upon which many and most walk throughout their life (Matthew 7:13-14). It is an easy road because there is little opposition to people walking on it. Jesus clearly stated that this path is leading all who walk it to eternal death in hell rather than eternal life in heaven.

Sadly, not only does the world walk this road, but many who profess to be Christians find this road to be the path of least resistance. It seems increasingly there is little difference between those who profess Christ and those who do not. They both use the same blasphemous and vulgar speech. They both tell and listen to the same vile jokes. They both fall at the feet of the same movie stars, music stars, and sports stars. They both have a herd mentality in following the multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2).

We will all follow someone. The only question is, who is it that we will follow: the many on the broad path that leads to destruction or the few on the narrow path that leads to life—the many that follow the world, the flesh, and the devil or the few that follow Jesus Christ and His truth (regardless of how unpopular it is, regardless of what it may cost, or regardless how few cling to it)? Jesus identifies one undeniable grace that is true of all His sheep: they hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:4-5).

The Lord Jesus tells His bride where she will hear His voice in our text this Lord's Day: The main points are: (1) Jesus Gives a Gentle Correction; (2) Jesus Expresses His Affection; (3) Jesus Tells Where He Feeds His Flock.

I. Jesus Gives a Gentle Correction.

A. The beloved bride of Jesus Christ had just expressed her great love to the Lord Jesus (Song 1:7), which is true of all genuine Christians. That love is evidenced in both words ("O thou whom my soul loveth") and deeds in following Him and wanting to be near Him ("Tell me where thou feedest"). True love (for Jesus and for one another) is not limited to just words and no deeds, or to just deeds and no words. Without words of love, deeds will seem as a mere duty and nothing more. And without deeds of love, words will become meaningless. Affection should be both spoken out and acted out. This the true bride of Jesus Christ does.

B. That true and sacrificial love for Jesus Christ hungers and thirsts to be near Him and to be fed the spiritual graces and truth which only He can give; and so the true bride inquires of the Lord Jesus where He feeds His flock (Song 1:7). She does not want to be misled by those who merely claim to be Christ's companions (Song 1:7), but rather earnestly desires to walk in the narrow path of those in whom Jesus Christ is clearly heard.

C. The Lord Jesus (the Good Shepherd) now directly speaks for the first time (Song 1:8). He has been spoken about and spoken to previously, but now He directly addresses His beloved bride (whom He has chosen in love from all eternity and for whom He was sacrificed to cleanse her from the guilt, condemnation, and bondage of her sin). Before directly answering her question as to where He feeds His flock, He gently rebukes her ignorance by saying, "If thou know not." The words of Jesus here imply that His beloved bride should know where He feeds His flock.

1. Throughout the history of the church (whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament), it has not always been so easy to find the place where Jesus was feeding (or is feeding) His flock. This has been and is due to backsliding, compromise, and lukewarmness within the church and persecution against the church that has so narrowed the path and made so few the number in whose preaching the

faithful voice of Jesus Christ can be heard. This is the reason for the ignorance of the elect bride in asking where Jesus feeds His flock. It is not a lack of desire.

2. Notice the gentle and patient rebuke given here by Jesus. It is not given with cruelty or harshness, but is given in love and tenderness. When I consider the great compassion of the Lord Jesus in speaking to those who are weak and frail and who are like a smoking flax or a bruised reed, I am ashamed and brought to my knees. Jesus was ever so patient with the weaknesses of His apostles, but indignant with the hardness, pride, and self-righteousness of the religious leaders. He came to save those who know they are dead in sin, not those who think they are just a little sick with sin. Dear Christian, Jesus is full of tenderness and love for you who struggle, battle, and war against the flesh, but who hate and despise all those failures, who repent, who seek His forgiveness, and who renew their covenant and obedience to Him (that is the gospel). How tender and gentle then should you be with your own spouse or children or parents or brothers and sisters in Christ? When you lose your temper and forsake patience over the weaknesses of others, you have forgotten the patience of the Lord with you (Luke 7:44-47).

II. Jesus Expresses His Affection.

A. Whereas Christ's elect bride had earlier described herself as being "black" (Song 1:5) from the sun-scorched persecution she had received from those who despised her stand for Christ and His truth, yet she also described herself as being "comely" (Song 1:5) or beautiful from the love and grace she had received from Jesus Christ. She was ugly in the eyes of her persecutors, but beautiful in the eyes of her Savior. Now the Lord Jesus speaks for Himself as to the beauty He sees in His beloved bride: "O thou fairest among women" (Song 1:8).

B. Has Jesus forgotten that you are "shapen in iniquity" and "conceived in sin" (Psalm 51:5)? Absolutely not! Can you hide now your sin from Him? Of course not! And yet He who knows you completely loves you eternally, infinitely, and unchangeably.

1. The glory of Jesus Christ is that He does not forget, but yet He sees the beauty of His own righteousness and the forgiveness of all your sins which have been credited to you by His grace. He has not forgotten your sin, and yet He beholds the beauty of His grace in sanctifying you until you will be a bride that is without spot or wrinkle. He has not forgotten your sin; He simply does not remember you sin against you any longer, because He died to remove it forever from you as a curse against you (His resurrection is His guarantee of that truth). The beauty of His grace has overcome the ugliness of your sin.

2. The elect bride of Jesus Christ is only beautiful in His sight because of the beauty He has freely and mercifully bestowed upon her. Will you trust the words of Jesus Christ here when He declares about you (dear Christian) that you are by His amazing grace "fairest" and most beautiful in His sight? Yes, you have many imperfections, weaknesses, besetting sins with which you yet struggle, and over which you mourn and repent (your mourning and repentance is even beautiful to Him).

3. Dear ones, never ever forget these blessed words of the Lord Jesus in all of your struggles against sin: "O thou fairest among women." He cannot love you more than He does or less than He does. His love is infinite and unchangeable. That is what hope clings to when your sin would overwhelm you. Without that truth, there is no hope. There is no reason to go on. Don't forget the goal of mourning over sin is that of being comforted due to the amazing grace and love of Jesus Christ.

4. It is that sacrificial love that Jesus has for you that draws you to Him. It is likewise that sacrificial love that a husband has for His bride that makes her beautiful in his sight and that draws her unto him.

III. Jesus Tells Where He Feeds His Flock.

A. Now we hear the loving response of Jesus (the Good Shepherd) to the inquiry of His redeemed bride who earnestly hungers and thirsts to know where Jesus feeds His flock with His love and truth. There are two related responses that Jesus gives to His beloved bride.

1. “Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock” (Song 1:8).

a. Whereas the bride had expressed her unwillingness to follow the flocks of unfaithful companions of Christ (unfaithful ministers and elders) in Song 1:7, Jesus rather tells the bride to follow the footsteps of the faithful flock of Jesus Christ. You see, there are historical footsteps that both the faithful and the unfaithful leave for others to follow. Those historical footsteps of the faithful flock that have blazed a trail for us to follow include among others: The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, the *Solemn League and Covenant*, the *Renewal at Auchensaugh*, the *Directory for Public Worship*, the *Presbyterial Form of Church Government*, and the *Act, Declaration, and Testimony*. We are not Roman Catholics who believe such historical standards inherently possess the same authority as God’s infallible Word in Holy Scripture. They only possess authority in the Church of Jesus Christ because they are agreeable to and accurately summarize Holy Scripture (they have a subordinate authority not a supreme authority). All such faithful testimonies throughout history are footsteps of the faithful flock of Jesus Christ; and Jesus commands His beloved bride to walk therein—not deviating from those footsteps. This principle is found elsewhere in Scripture as well (Proverbs 22:28; Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 7:13-14; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:16-17; Hebrews 6:12).

b. One of the objections that is often brought against walking in the faithful footsteps of our spiritual forefathers is how few are walking in those faithful footsteps presently. But that is precisely what Jesus said was and would be the case (Matthew 7:14). It is not new that few walk in these faithful footsteps of the flock.

(1) **Noah** stood alone as a “preacher of righteousness” and yet the truth of God was with him. Destruction fell upon the majority, while Noah and his family were preserved.

(2) **Joshua and Caleb** were only two spies out of twelve who gave a good report after inspecting the Promise Land. Their report was faithful; the report of the majority was unfaithful. God judged the majority who followed the ten spies and blessed Joshua and Caleb.

(3) **Elijah** stood alone for the Lord on Mt. Carmel against hundreds of the prophets of Baal. The majority were judged while Elijah was faithful.

(4) **Jeremiah** stood alone against the ecclesiastical and political establishment in Jerusalem (“Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them” Jeremiah 16:19). He followed not the many.

(5) **Jesus Christ** called those who faithfully followed Him “a little flock” (Luke 12:32) in comparison to the many that opposed the truth of Jesus Christ. Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

(6) **Calvin** noted that the truth is not always upheld by the majority when he wrote (*Concerning Scandals*, pp.109,110, emphases added):

It is an offense to a great many people that they see almost **the whole world** opposed to us. And indeed the patrons of a bad cause do not neglect their own advantage, using a strategem like this so as not to upset the ignorant and weak, that it is extremely absurd that almost the whole Christian world is disregarded, **so that the faith is to be possessed by a few men.**

c. These faithful, historical paths of the flock become overgrown so that it is difficult to find them at times of backsliding, compromise, lukewarmness, and persecution (when the faithful are scattered). And yet even if the footsteps are hardly visible, even if there are few that presently walk those

faithful paths, the command of Jesus is yet clear: “Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock” (Song 1:8).

2. The second response of the Lord Jesus to His beloved bride is this: “Feed thy kids beside the shepherds’ tents” (Song 1:8).

a. These “shepherds” are faithful pastors and elders who uphold the old paths of truth and righteousness. These “shepherds” in Song 1:8 are distinguished from the “companions” in Song 1:7. The elect bride wants to avoid the companions (who walk not in the faithful historical testimony of the past), but she is told by Jesus to bring all of her young ones to feed beside the shepherds’ tents (those who are faithful to the good old paths of our faithful forefathers of the past). We are to cherish it because it agrees with Scripture, not despise it because it is found in history outside of Scripture.

b. Here is a sound biblical principle as to where the beloved bride should find her spiritual nourishment: she will find it in all of its truth, power, glory, and beauty at the tents (churches) of those shepherds who walk in the faithful historical testimony (the footsteps) of the flock. And at the same time she will avoid all shepherds whose churches have subverted in their constitutions the truth of Scripture that was adopted and professed in the faithful subordinate standards of the Church of Scotland and her faithful daughters in her purest times. For though churches adhering to the foundation of Christ are true churches; nevertheless we are not to turn aside to follow ministers and churches that are disorderly in their constitutions, but are to avoid them (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

What footprints are you leaving behind you? Would you be ashamed to have those who follow you to walk in your footsteps? Have you walked one way in public and another way at home or in private? Everyone will leave footsteps behind them when they die. Will your footsteps lead your children and your posterity up a clear path to reformation or down an unclear path to compromise? You see, dear ones, you are not only to walk in the faithful footsteps of the flock, but you are to leave behind faithful footsteps for those who follow you to walk therein. So many today are concerned about carbon footprints and the environment. I am far more concerned about the doctrinal and moral footprints we leave behind. The footprint we leave behind us must be this: Follow me as I follow Christ. May that footprint be clear enough for all to follow.

Copyright 2019 Greg L. Price.